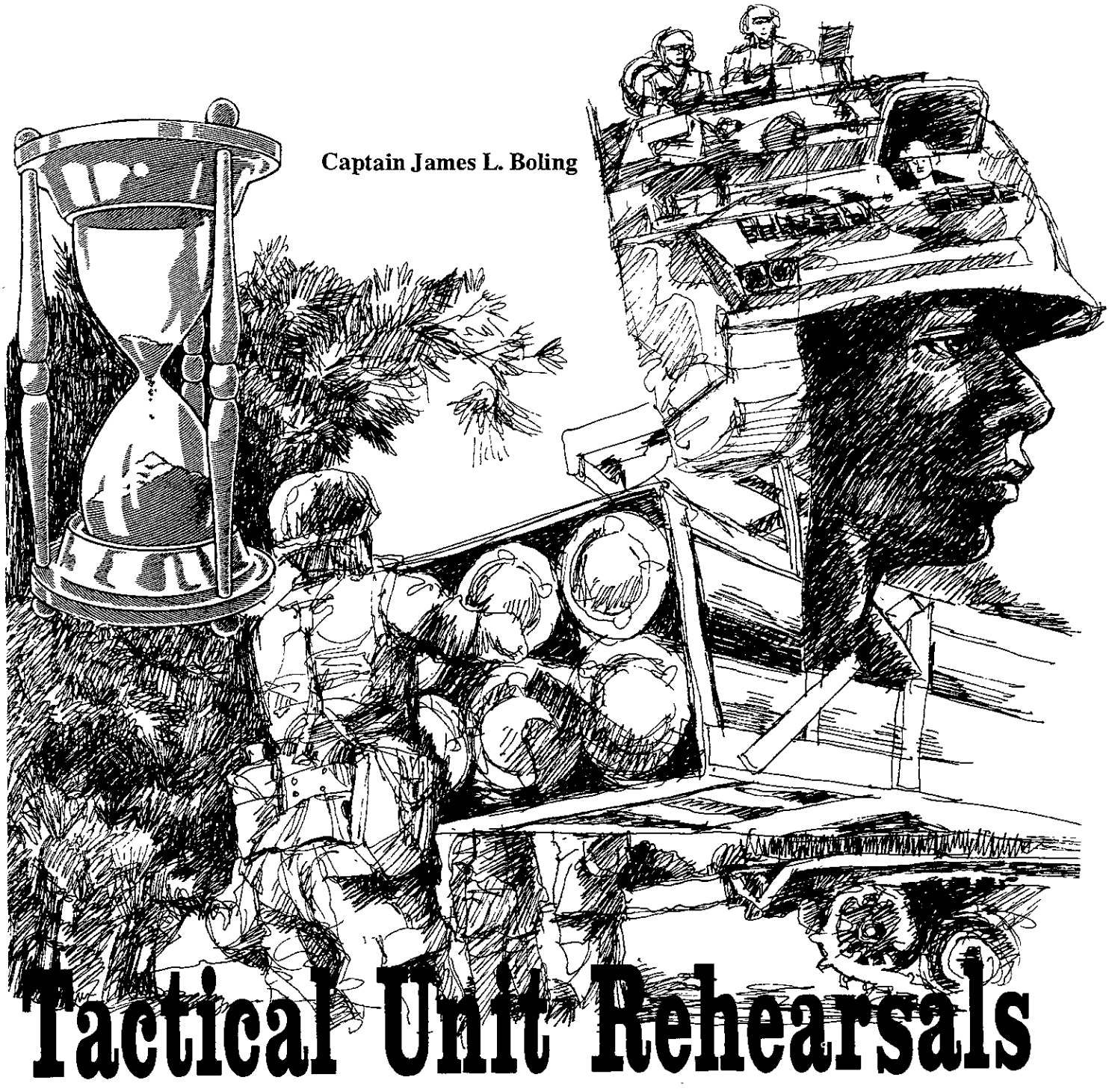
Captain James L. Boling



# Tactical Unit Rehearsals

The battlefield of tomorrow will be a terrifying and bewildering environment where we will be opposed by a tough, determined, and resourceful enemy. The lethal, fast-paced, and continuous nature of combat in such an environment will tax to the utmost our leadership and command and control. To succeed there, units will have to execute highly decentralized operations with precision, speed, and certainty. This kind of execution will demand that every leader and every soldier understand the concept of the operation and where he and his unit fit into it. This level of understanding can be achieved through effective rehearsals of tactical unit operations.

It has been shown that units training at the National Training Center (NTC) can improve their performance by conducting well-planned, well-executed multi-echeloned combined arms rehearsals. Yet most units do not appear to have much experience with rehearsal techniques. Some do not even attempt to rehearse, and some rehearse so poorly that their efforts only bewilder the participants.

If good rehearsals do lead to unit success, the techniques

and procedures of rehearsal planning and execution deserve our attention, and the time spent in mastering rehearsal skills will be well spent.

Rehearsing key combat actions allows soldiers to become familiar with an operation and to translate the relatively dry recitation of a tactical plan into visual impressions. These visual impressions then help the soldiers orient themselves to their environment and also to the other units during the operation.

Moreover, the repetition of combat tasks during a rehearsal leaves a lasting mental picture of the sequence of the key actions of the operation. Rehearsals also provide a forum through which subordinate units and leaders can "proof" the tactical plan, before it is too late, to ascertain its feasibility and the adequacy of its command control measures.

Rehearsals do take time, and time is probably the most precious resource a commander has. The amount of time a rehearsal requires varies with the complexity of the task to be rehearsed, the type of rehearsal, and the level of participation. For this reason, rehearsals should be conducted at the lowest possible level using the most thorough technique the available time allows.

## CLASSIFICATION

Rehearsals can be classified in two ways—by the technique used and by who participates. Following one convention, techniques are identified with numbers (Levels I-III) and participation with letters (Types A-D). Any combination of number and letter codes can be used to tell subordinates which type of rehearsal will be conducted and who will attend. The techniques, then, starting at the top, are described as follows:

- Level III rehearsals are full-scale dress rehearsals that involve the use of real-time mounted and dismounted maneuver operations over the actual, or similar, terrain. These rehearsals obviously require the most resources and may remove key leaders from their units for extended periods. Level III rehearsals are desirable, but rarely feasible, at brigade or battalion level.
- Level II rehearsals are scaled down operations that use selected personnel (usually key leaders) mounted in wheeled or tracked vehicles to maneuver over terrain that is similar to the actual terrain over which the unit will operate. Level II rehearsals cover smaller areas, require fewer resources than Level III rehearsals, are possible at all levels of command, but may not cover the entire planned operation. They may focus instead on just a few key actions such as a hasty river crossing or link-up operation. A recommended scale is 100 meters equals one kilometer.
- Level I rehearsals are conducted on a very small scale and do not involve mounted or dismounted maneuver. Examples include map wargaming, sandtable talk-throughs, and local area, scale model walk-throughs. Level I rehearsals may cover an entire planned operation or may concentrate only on key actions. (A walk-through scale of two meters equals one kilometer is recommended.) Level I walk-throughs of an entire operation often follow Level II or III rehearsals of critical actions by subordinate units. Level I rehearsals are the norm at brigade level, while subordinate battalions and companies execute more detailed rehearsals.

Personnel participation is closely linked to the levels of rehearsals. The following listing is for the four types of personnel participation at battalion level. Obviously, not all of these people are assigned at brigade or company level. (The accompanying matrix shows the combinations of personnel participation at each level of command.)

- Type A participation includes the commander, S-3, fire support officer (FSO), air liaison officer (ALO), executive officer (XO), primary staff, battalion motor officer (BMO), subordinate commanders with their FSOs, specialty platoon leaders, and combat support (CS) unit commanders. Type A rehearsals are not usually conducted at brigade level because the group is too large for anything other than Level III rehearsals.
- Type B includes the commander, XO, S-3, FSO, ALO, subordinate commanders with FSOs, mortar and scout platoon leaders, and CS unit commanders.
- Type C includes the commander, S-3, FSO, ALO, subordinate commanders, mortar and scout platoon leaders, and CS unit commanders, as required by the mission. (If, for example, the mission involves a deliberate breach of a complex obstacle, the engineer unit commander would be present, but the air defense artillery unit commander might not.)
- Type D includes the commander, S-3, FSO, ALO, and subordinate commanders.

## PARTICIPATION

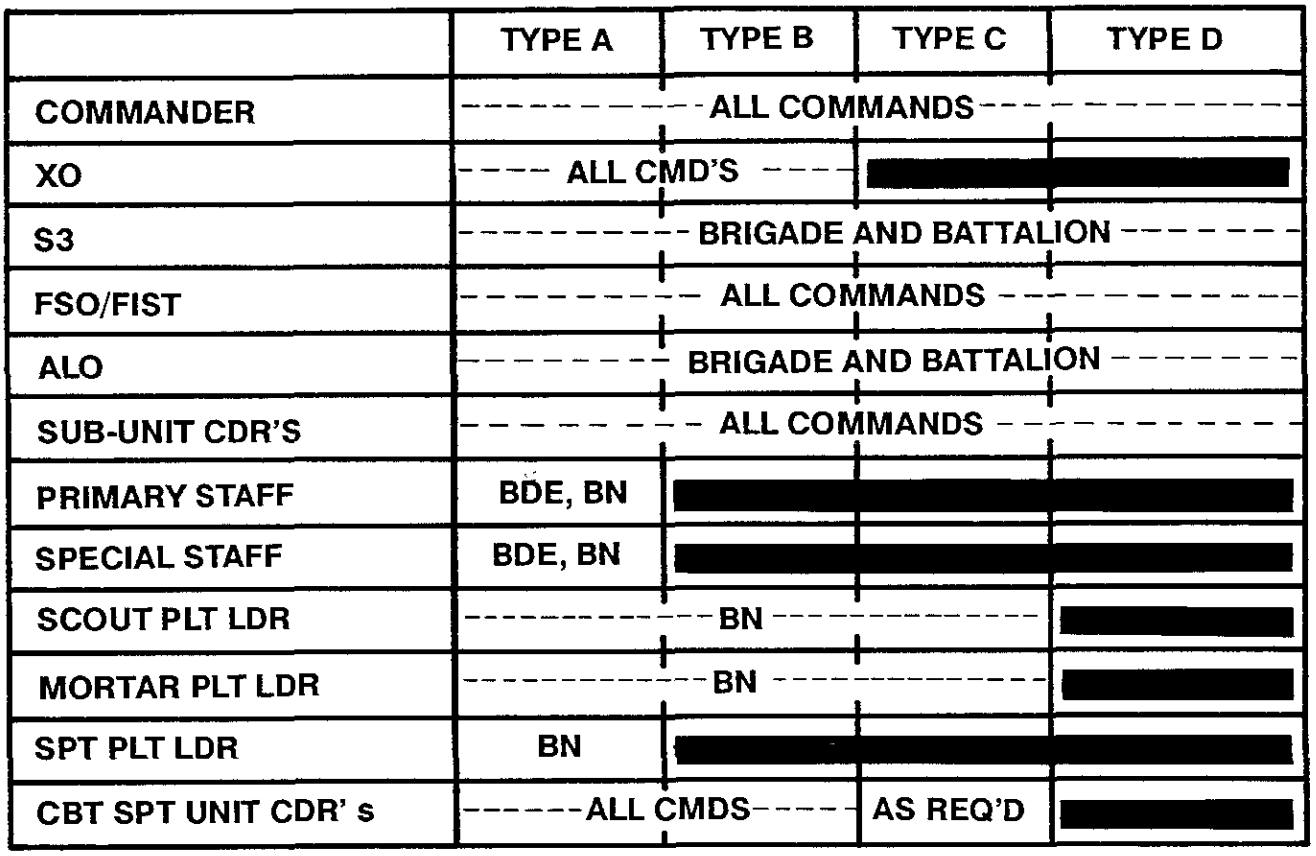
Certain degrees of participation are more appropriate to certain rehearsal levels than others. For instance, Type B and C participation is most appropriate for Level I rehearsals, while Type A participation is most commonly associated with Level III rehearsals.

Participation should be closely matched to the rehearsal level to gain the most benefit from a rehearsal. Too many idle people watching instead of participating, or the absence of certain key personnel, detracts from the quality and the benefit of the rehearsal.

Portions of the planned operation may be rehearsed in more detail with more players while other portions may be less involved. This information may be included in the "coordinating instructions" portion of the operations order (OPORD) or briefed orally at the conclusion of the orders briefing.

The order might specify, for example, "River crossing rehearsal II-B at 1245 hours, vicinity tactical operations center (TOC). Entire operation rehearsal I-C walk-through, at 1330, vicinity EF 45332345." Note that the more general rehearsal comes after the more specific rehearsal and

## REHEARSAL TYPES




subsequent fine tuning of the river crossing, the critical action. This assigns the river crossing itself priority in the event time runs out, and it allows for the inclusion of whatever changes may need to be made as a result of the river crossing rehearsal.

Although this technique can be used at any level from company to brigade, it is generally not used at company level because of the small number of participants. Instead, a company commander simply tells his subordinates who should be there, when, and with what equipment to do what tasks.

Although most of the rehearsals that maneuver units plan and conduct are rehearsals of combat actions by subordinate maneuver units, rehearsals of special tasks or special functional groups are sometimes desirable. These might include command group, TOC shift, decontamination, reconnaissance and security (R&S) plan, and engineer reserve demolition target turn-over rehearsals. The decision concerning which special rehearsals to conduct, if any, is the commander's. Special rehearsals can be as formal or informal as the need dictates and the time allows.

Special rehearsals do not fit neatly into the type and level classifications outlined above. How extensive a rehearsal should be and who should participate depend on the time available, the complexity of the tasks, and the unit's level of training. A TOC shift rehearsal, for example, is often nothing more than a talk-through of key information and the actions likely to be taken by the TOC, set against the framework of the S-2's decision support template. When a certain unit must cross a known contaminated area, decontamination may be a Level III, Type A rehearsal on the actual terrain. And the battalion S-2 may conduct a Level II, Type D rehearsal of the patrolling portion of the battalion R&S plan with the scout platoon.

Rehearsal planning consists primarily of deciding what, how, who, and when. Ideally, the entire operation is rehearsed from start to finish, but this is seldom possible, nor is it necessary when the units are reasonably competent in most of their battle tasks. Instead, rehearsals usually focus on selected critical tasks that are deemed necessary to the accomplishment of the mission.

A good starting point from which to select the tasks to be rehearsed is with the critical tasks identified by the S-3 or the commander during his troop leading procedures. Obviously, tasks that are either vital to the mission, especially complex, or totally unfamiliar to the troops would receive top priority. If the priority list of tasks becomes too long, the commander or S-3 may subjectively eliminate certain lower priority tasks from further consideration. This subjective determination is based primarily on the time available for rehearsals.

As an example, a battalion task force is scheduled to conduct a movement from an assembly area, a forward passage of lines, and a deliberate attack against a dug-in

motorized rifle company (MRC). The battalion commander and S-3 may identify as critical the passage of lines, the breach of the initial obstacle belt, the defeat of the combat security outpost, the capture of the enemy position, and the defeat of the motorized rifle regiment's (MRR's) counterattack. Although each of these should be rehearsed, the commander must weigh the tasks on the basis of the time available (say eight hours); the training status of the subordinate units (uniformly good, but they haven't breached an obstacle in two years); the commander's intent (the battalion absolutely has to be in position to defeat the MRR counterattack); and the complexity of the task (forward passage of lines at night through an allied unit with no clear obstacle plan and guides who cannot speak English). In this example, then, he might assign first priority to the passage of lines, second to the obstacle breach, and third to the defeat of the counterattack. Then, if time remains, he might choose to rehearse other tasks as well.

Although only a few tactical events are actually rehearsed, these rehearsals are generally followed by a Level I rehearsal of the entire operation. This allows participants in the other single-task rehearsals to rehearse in the context of the operation as a whole.

Each level of rehearsal has an associated cost in terms of time and resources, with time being by far the greatest consideration, not only for the rehearsal itself but also for its preparation and multiple iterations. Rehearsing to proficiency in given tasks requires several runs. When the time for these is added to the time required for an AAR after each run and possible adjustments to the plan, rehearsing even the most straightforward combat tasks requires a great deal of time and resources.

## REHEARSAL TERRAIN

Depending on the level of rehearsal to be conducted, time must be allocated for preparation. A good rule of thumb is to conduct rehearsals along the lines of the one-third/two-thirds rule, scheduling them to be conducted after subordinate units have used one-third of *their* time. In sequencing rehearsals, commanders must consider the crawl-walk-run approach and the "nesting" of simultaneous complementary tasks.

In the crawl-walk-run approach, units conduct less intense, smaller scale, or "half-speed" rehearsals in preparation for subsequent iterations that are closer to full dress rehearsals. Similarly, units may execute Level III (run) rehearsals of small-unit tasks in preparation for a Level I (walk) rehearsal conducted by their higher headquarters.

The "nesting" of simultaneous complementary tasks involves breaking down a highly complex task into subtasks that are rehearsed separately, then combined into a later rehearsal of the entire complex task. For example, if a unit with engineer support is to execute a deliberate breach of a complex obstacle, the "nesting" might have the maneuver unit conduct a Level II rehearsal of its assault force and support forces while the engineer unit does the same for its breaching force. Later, these three forces might conduct a Level III rehearsal of the entire breaching operation.

These various rehearsals must be synchronized. Too, rehearsal requirements at different levels of command must not be so numerous or so closely spaced that the subordinate units are not given time for their own rehearsals or that the commanders need to be in two places at the same time. The time required to move between rehearsal sites and available daylight hours must also be considered.

A commander's decisions concerning rehearsals are either included in the OPORD, briefed at its conclusion, or included in a warning order. An extremely detailed and complex rehearsal scheme, such as a Level III-A rehearsal at night, may require a separate annex to the OPORD.

Regardless of which method or level of rehearsal is to be conducted, a single person or staff section must be made responsible for the manual preparation of the site and for the supporting overlay and other materials. Typically, the S-3 section at battalion or brigade level has this responsibility, and at company level, the commander or the XO.

Preparing for Level II and Level III rehearsals consists of selecting a suitable piece of terrain, preparing overlays, and providing for necessary combat service support (CSS).

## LEVEL OF REHEARSAL

The terrain for a rehearsal is selected on the basis of a map and ground reconnaissance. The terrain must match as closely as possible the actual terrain in the area of operation. Key elements of similarity should include vegetation, visibility, and prominent terrain features. In addition, the terrain must be available for the unit to use. If it is outside the unit's area of operations, coordination will be required. Unfortunately, the use of the same full-scale piece of terrain as the actual operation is possible only for defensive and retrograde operations.

Terrain management is a significant handicap to large-scale, realistic rehearsals, especially in a combat environment. The density of units on the battlefield makes finding adequate pieces of terrain for Level III rehearsals almost impossible for offensive operations. Obviously, the larger the unit rehearsing and the larger the scale of the rehearsal, the more difficult it is to find and use suitable terrain.

Once a suitable piece of terrain is selected, it may still need some modification to portray the actual terrain more accurately. A shallow cut with an engineer dozer blade, for example, can simulate a river, or a pile of empty ammunition crates a town. Some crates with a tarp thrown over them can represent a hill, and camouflage nets can simulate forests.

The difficulty of these additions to the existing terrain will be influenced by the scale selected for the rehearsal. The smaller the scale, the easier the adjustments. The selection of terrain features to portray or highlight may be influenced by the visibility conditions that will be present during the operation itself. If, for example, the operation

will take place at night, highly visible, close-in terrain features should be represented instead of more prominent but distant features that will not be visible.

The overlays needed for a rehearsal are aligned with a 1:50,000 map but show scaled-down graphic control measures for use during the rehearsal. Scaled overlays also indicate the rehearsal identity of certain key terrain features. For example, a rehearsal overlay may identify a highway on the map as a river.

To execute full-scale Level III rehearsals correctly, a unit must have combat service support and must plan extensively for its use. In many ways, the depth and detail of this planning and coordination will mirror that of the unit's peacetime field training exercises. Depending on the size of the unit rehearsing and the proximity of the rehearsal terrain, units may need to plan and execute tactical roadmarches to move to the rehearsal site. Food, water, pyrotechnic devices, and medical support for the participants must be coordinated. Illumination devices or "chemlights" may be required for night rehearsals, and the headquarters conducting the rehearsal routinely provides these items and coordinates their use as necessary. If the participants must supply a certain item on their own, this will be highlighted in the briefing or annex that explains the rehearsal.

Except for map or terrain sketch talk-throughs, Level I rehearsals generally require as much preparation time as Level II or III rehearsals, because field expedient materials and training aids are usually required to build a reasonable facsimile of the area of operations on what is really a small piece of fairly uniform terrain.

Almost anything can be used to build the terrain model—rocks, brush, empty cans, crates, and the like. Operational graphics can be overlaid on the model using engineer tape, branches, or lumber. Walk-throughs may be accompanied by painted, color-coded five-gallon cans to represent other units, both friendly and enemy.

Given enough time before deployment, units can assemble sand-table kits containing various materials for building small-scale terrain models. These kits may include armored vehicle identification kit models from training support centers or commercially available replicas. Narrow engineer tape, various sizes and shapes of wooden blocks, spray paint, and sandbags may also be included. Sandbags can be crumpled to simulate vegetation or filled with dirt and rocks to portray terrain features. This kit is typically carried in the TOC where one soldier maintains it and is responsible for the construction of the terrain model. At company level it can be carried in the combat trains or a less elaborate version in the commander's vehicle. (In the absence of a kit, the steel side skirts of an M1 tank or a Bradley fighting vehicle can be used with colored chalk drawings of terrain features and small-scale vehicle models or unit symbols glued to magnets.)

Once the personnel specified in the rehearsal instructions

are assembled at the rehearsal site, the commander or S-3 briefs the participants and then leads the rehearsal. This briefing includes an introduction, an overview, and an orientation.

After the rehearsal leader introduces himself and all the other key participants, he briefs the participants on his briefing topics, what is going to be rehearsed, and in what sequence. He briefs a general time line and a fixed not-later-than ending time. He explains when and how the after action reviews will be conducted, who will conduct them, and how any changes will be incorporated into the existing plan. He explains in detail any restrictions such as the use of pyrotechnics, light discipline, weapon firing, or radio transmissions. He ensures that all participants understand whatever safety precautions are in force.

Finally, he emphasizes what results are expected from the rehearsal and what standards of task execution are to be achieved. He gives subordinate leaders an opportunity to share the results of whatever tactical planning or rehearsals they may already have conducted. If a subordinate unit at this time recommends a change to the existing plan, the commander or S-3 acts on the recommendation before beginning the rehearsal.

During the orientation portion, the rehearsal leader orients the participants to the terrain or scale model being used, making sure the scaled overlays are distributed if this is appropriate. He identifies north on the terrain model or the scaled terrain and points out which objects and terrain features represent which actual terrain features. For example, he may say, "The large tarp-covered pile of crates at two o'clock at about 75 meters represents Hill 624. The red five-gallon cans near the military crest simulate the three motorized rifle platoon positions located there."

He explains any graphic control symbols, obstacles, or fire support targets that are represented. For example, "The 7.62 ammunition cans with the white crosses represent the coordination points between units. The 120mm tank gun round bases represent the ground-emplaced minefields. The crosses of engineer tape spraypainted red are artillery and mortar targets." He always concludes the orientation with a call for questions.

After this briefing, the rehearsal begins in accordance with the plan that has been briefed. The commander or the S-3 observes and critiques all portions of the rehearsal, with the critiques centering on meeting the commander's intent and coordination between units. The execution of tasks within the rehearsal is almost always left to the judgment and discretion of the subordinate unit commander. Leaders at all levels conduct periodic AARs to ensure that tasks are rehearsed to the acceptable levels of competence and that a substandard performance is not reinforced. These AARs also provide an opportunity to incorporate lessons learned into the existing plan or into subsequent rehearsals.

The rehearsal leader must emphasize the integration of fire support, events that trigger different contingency actions, and actions on contact. If units in reserve are rehearsed, those units should rehearse all of their most likely contingencies. The rehearsals continue until the units are competent or until the time available has expired. (The commander can extend the allocated time but should refrain from curtailing it.) Succeeding iterations of the rehearsal may include more complex tasks and added realism as the commander sees fit.

At the conclusion of the rehearsal, the commander reassembles the participants to review the lessons learned and any modifications to the existing plan. In this meeting, the commander can also issue any last-minute instructions or reminders and reiterate his intent for the operation. Any changes made to the existing plan are then incorporated into the orders and plans of the subordinate units. Such changes are also briefed to any key leader or unit that did not participate in the rehearsal.

Since it has been shown that adequate rehearsals do, in fact, lead to successful training, the techniques and procedures of planning and executing rehearsals deserve our attention. Effective rehearsals are clearly a prelude to tactical success on tomorrow's battlefield.

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